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**Modern Trends on Mothers
and Family Structures**

A Comparison between the USA and Russia

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1 Introduction

Child development is the process through which humans grow from infancy through adolescence and finally to adulthood. Children undergo phenomenal growth during this transitional phase and are very sensitive to external stimuli. Child development is therefore the framework that molds a child's future health, professional success, social well-being, and overall happiness in life [1]. As such, good child development practices are critical to society and its study is generally important. Child development itself is a broad topic, and some influences on it include of societal, cognitive, emotional, and educational aspects [2].

The involvement of and interaction between family members has a particularly profound impact on a child's development. Family members, especially parents, are ideally involved in every aspect of their children's lives and thus have a profound influence on their growth. In general, cooperative biological parents and intact families are better able to support their children since they more effectively demonstrate commitment and dedication to their children. Conversely, and unfortunately, evidence strongly shows that in the presence of conflict between parents (e.g. a divorce) adversely affect children due to several different but closely connected factors, including [3]:

- declines in income following separation,
- degradation in mental healthy and stability,
- inter-parental conflict creating a hostile environment, and
- compromises in parenting due to these distractions and loss of motivation.

It is therefore strongly desirable to have traditional and committed marriages in order to best support a child's growth.

Obviously, family structures and their impacts on children can vary greatly due to significant cultural and geographical differences. The United States and Russia are unique in that their historical foundations, summarized in Table 1, are antagonist towards each other. These differences can have significant impacts on culture and societal structure, and might cause one to prematurely conclude that family structures in these two countries are radically different. Despite the many historical and cultural differences that continue to persist, however, modern trends in family and motherhood possess some surprising similarities between these two countries.

	America	Russia
Authority	Diffused from people, flows up	Centralized, flows down
Change	From below, individual	Imposed from above, society
Rights	Celebrated, protected	Subordinated for communal good
Diverse Views	Tolerance, pluralism	Consensus, single truth
Economy	Private free market	Government-centered
Cultural roots	Western Europe	Europe, Asia
Warfare	Wars fought mostly abroad, little/no devastation	Constant cruelties, wars, devastation, hardships

Table 1: Historical differences between the USA and Russia [4]

2 Family Structures in the United States

Families in the United States had traditionally been nuclear. Here, the husband is the breadwinner, and the wife stays at home supporting the husband and raising the children. Generally, these types of families, when stable, provide a healthy environment for child development. Today, however, this nuclear family is much less prevalent, as seen in Illustration 1. Nowadays, only 7% of all families are traditional. 16% of families also have married parents, but here, both couples earn income, and hence there is less time for the parents to spend with their children as compared to nuclear families. Overall, only 23% of households include a married couple at least one child. 13% are dual-income without children, an 64% are all other households, which also include households without children. These other household factors are diverse and complex.

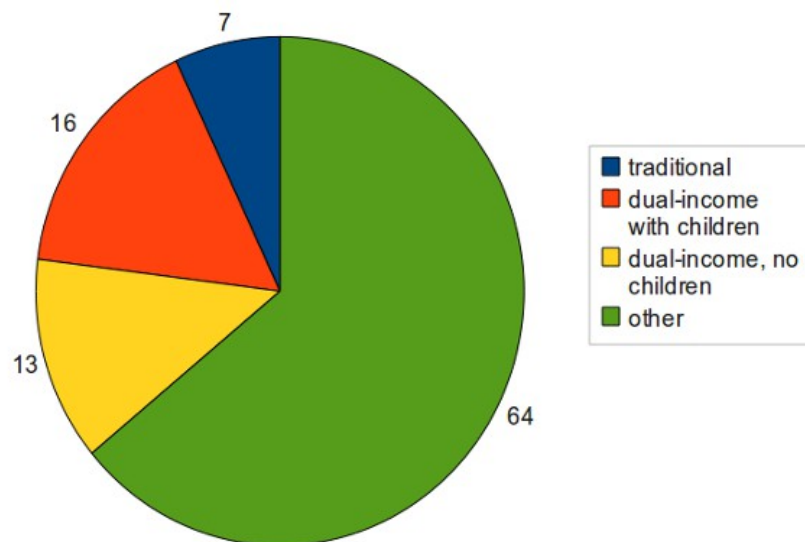


Illustration 1: Types of US Households in 2002 [5]

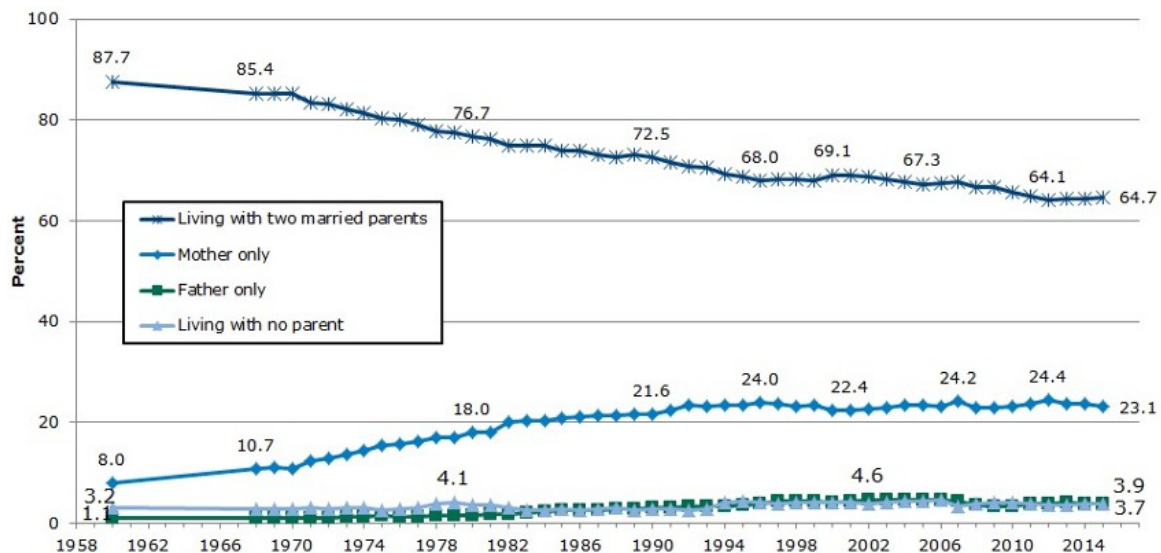


Illustration 2: Living arrangements of children under 18: 1970-2015[6].

A major factor here is the large divorce rate in the United States. As seen in Illustration 2, only 64.7% of all households with children are with two married parents, and a striking 23.1% are with single mothers. Overall, 27% of all households have a child living with only one parent, and 3.7% of all children do not live with either parent. This means that nearly 1/3 of all households have a less-than-ideal family structure for optimal child development.

As the importance of marriage decreases, an increasing number of couples are instead cohabiting with many of them having children, as seen in Illustration 3. However, cohabitation is not a good substitute for stable marriage in terms of optimal child

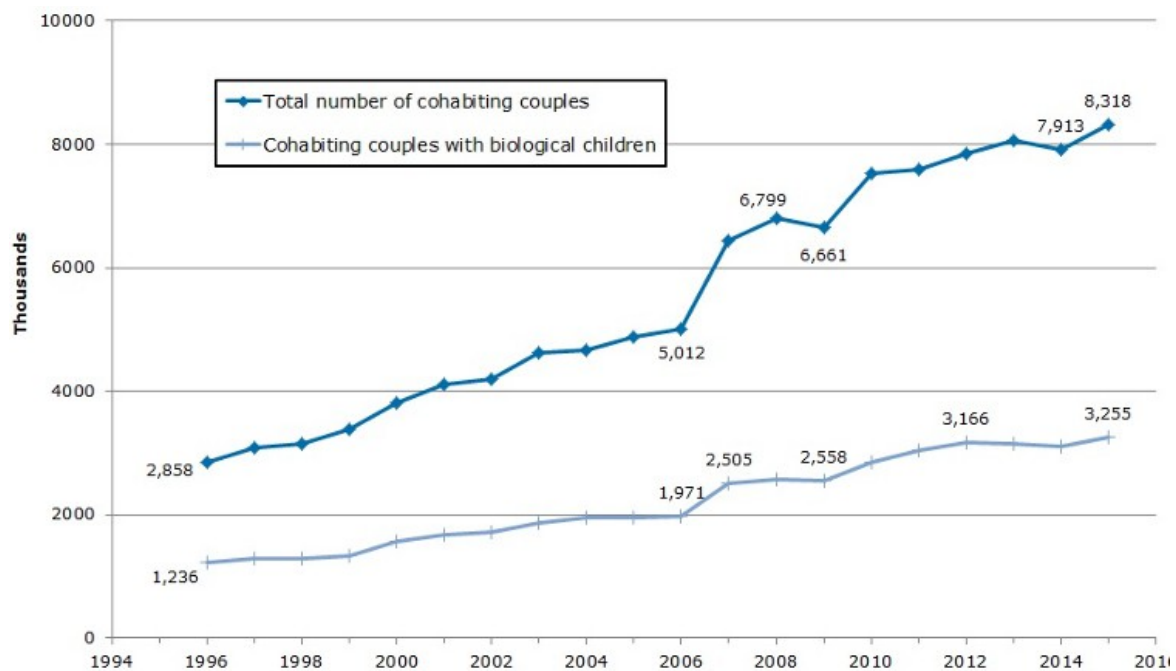


Illustration 3: Number of Opposite-Sex Cohabiting Couples (in Thousands), With and Without Children under 18: 1996-2015 [6].

development. Typically, unwed couples that live together with children are younger, less educated, lower income, and have less secure employment. Often, these factors lead to increased stress, mental degradation, compromised parenting, and most of all a lack of commitment between the two parents. This frequently leads to separation and therefore can be detrimental to a child's growth and well-being [6].

Feminist movements, resulting in changes in gender roles as well as more women pursuing their professional careers, is having a profound on family structure. Illustration 4 displays the increase in women, especially mothers, participating in the work force [7]. In 2014, 61% of mothers with children under the age of three had either part or full-time jobs, but as the children grew, participation rates increased to a peak of 73% before the financial crisis. This has helped enabled a paradigm shift where more American mothers than ever before to be the main breadwinners or sole providers for their households, as seen in Illustration 5.

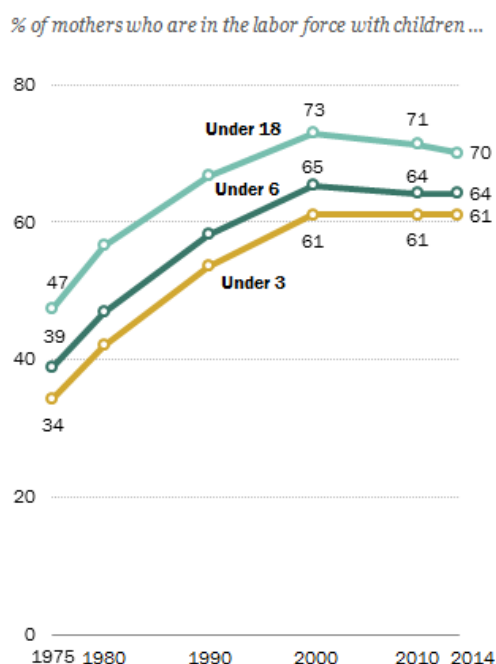


Illustration 4: More woman, especially mothers, are participating in the work force. [7]

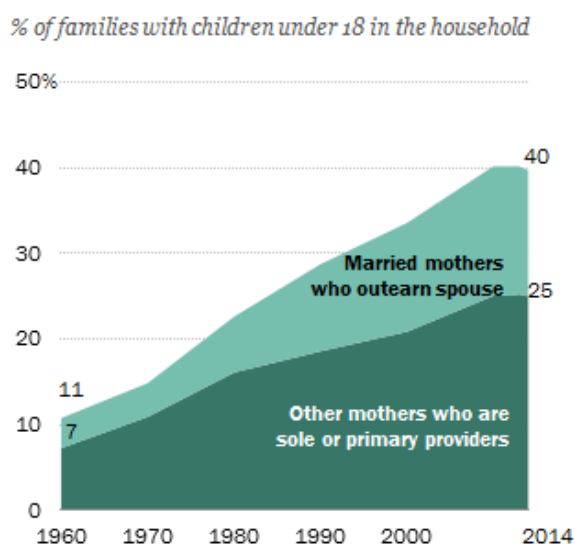


Illustration 5: More mothers are now the primary income earners of their households. [7]

While these trends certainly empower women to be independent, they also point to other trends that reduce the significance of family. As a result of women pursuing higher levels of education and succeeding in educational careers, women (and men) are also marrying at much older ages, as seen in Illustration 6. Since parents are more career focused, not only are having children delayed, but fewer children are born per household. While this might be good for the single child and is less work for the parents, this can cause demographic issues.

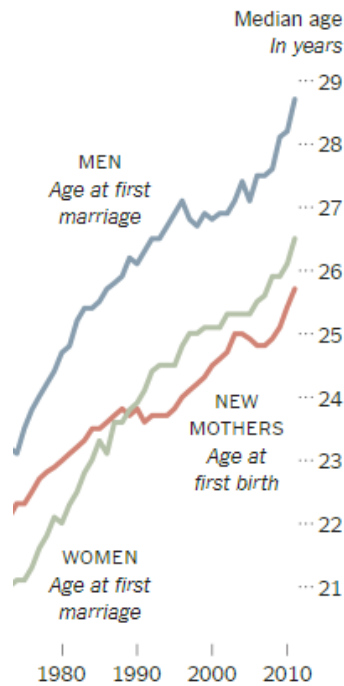


Illustration 6: Both men and women delay marrying to pursue their careers [8].

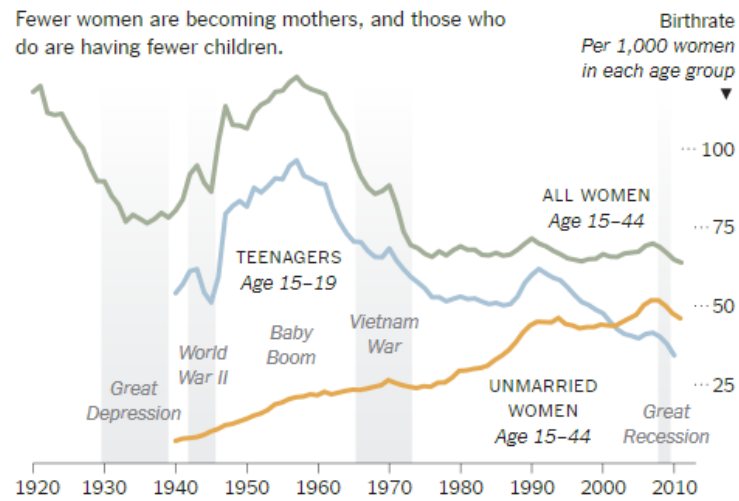


Illustration 7: Birth rates of women in the USA are decreasing [8].

Overall in the US, trends indicate that marriage in general is becoming less important as divorce rates and cohabitation increase. Furthermore, the importance of having children for married couples is also decreasing as they focus on their careers.

3 Family Structures in Russia

Russian families are traditionally large and friendly. These families differ from American nuclear families in that these are patriarchal and vertical in nature (e.g., grandparents and other members of the family are involved in the household or raising the child) [9]. Here, respect for elders is commonplace, and typically grandparents would watch the children so that the parents can pursue their own careers. This was often necessary as decades ago, marriages were very young, so the parents had not yet had a chance to start their professions.

Even today, young Russians still idealize family and raising children as a top priority. However, research has shown that the opposite is practiced in reality: Russian citizens frequently behave in infidelity, divorce and homosexuality [10]. In June 2014, the government made a report that pointed out the potential crisis in Russia due to the effects of weak family ties, high divorce rates, and low birth rates. Although 93 percent of Russians

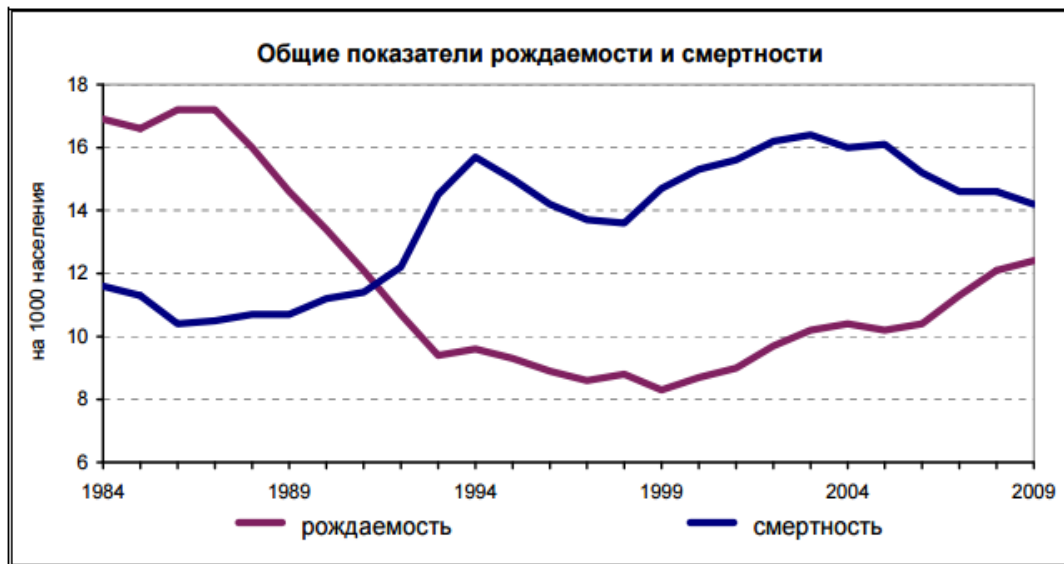
consider raising good a children a top goal, only 43 percent of respondents thought that lifelong marriage was necessary for having an ideal family. Even worse, only 11 percent of Russians believe that their own families meet these ideals. Table 2 provides some evidence that further suggests marriage itself is no longer a top priority for many Russians. Divorce rates reached an all-time high of nearly 70 percent in 2000 and have persistently stayed above 50% since 1995. Additionally, Illustration 7 demonstrates how dire the situation is, showing there are less births than there are deaths.

Years	Thousand		Per 1000 of population	
	marriages	divorces	marriages	divorces
1970	1319,2	396,6	10,1	3,0
1980	1464,6	580,7	10,6	4,2
1990	1319,9	559,9	8,9	3,8
1995	1075,2	665,9	7,3	4,5
2000	897,3	627,7	6,2	4,3
2005	1066,4	604,9	7,5	4,2
2006	1113,6	640,8	7,8	4,5
2007	1262,5	685,9	8,9	4,8
2008	1179,0	703,4	8,3	5,0
2009	1199,4	699,4	8,5	4,9
2010	1215,1	639,3	8,5	4,5

Russian Statistical Yearbook - 2011

Table 2: Divorce rates in Russia since 1970 [11].

Since the end of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, drastic social and cultural changes occurred that influenced the youth significantly. Tatyana Gurko, a doctor of sciences of family sociology in the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Sociology, claims that the Russian youth during this time underwent a sexual revolution and feminist movement reminiscent to the US and Europe in the 1960s [10]. Today, young Russians do not believe that every woman has the duty to become a mother, and further they superficially possess egalitarian instead of patriarchal values. Gurko also claims that the youngest generation of Russians in cities have reverted to infantile modes of behavior; they continue to live with their parents after graduating from a university. As a result, young Russians feel less responsibilities towards their spouses or even their children. Any social responsibilities are shifted to public day care or immediate family members.



Source: Russian Statistical Yearbook - 2011

Illustration 8: Birth-rate and mortality-rate dynamics [11].11

As a result of the high divorce rate and increased cohabitation rates, there is an increasing number of single mothers, as shown in Illustrations 9 and 10. Overall, 15% of all children now live with single mothers, and the proportion of single mothers to all mothers is about 18% [12]. While this is lower than in the United States, it is still a significant share of the population and can lead to undesirable environments for raising children. In this scenarios, single mothers tend to live with extended family members in complex household to benefit from family support and reduce costs.

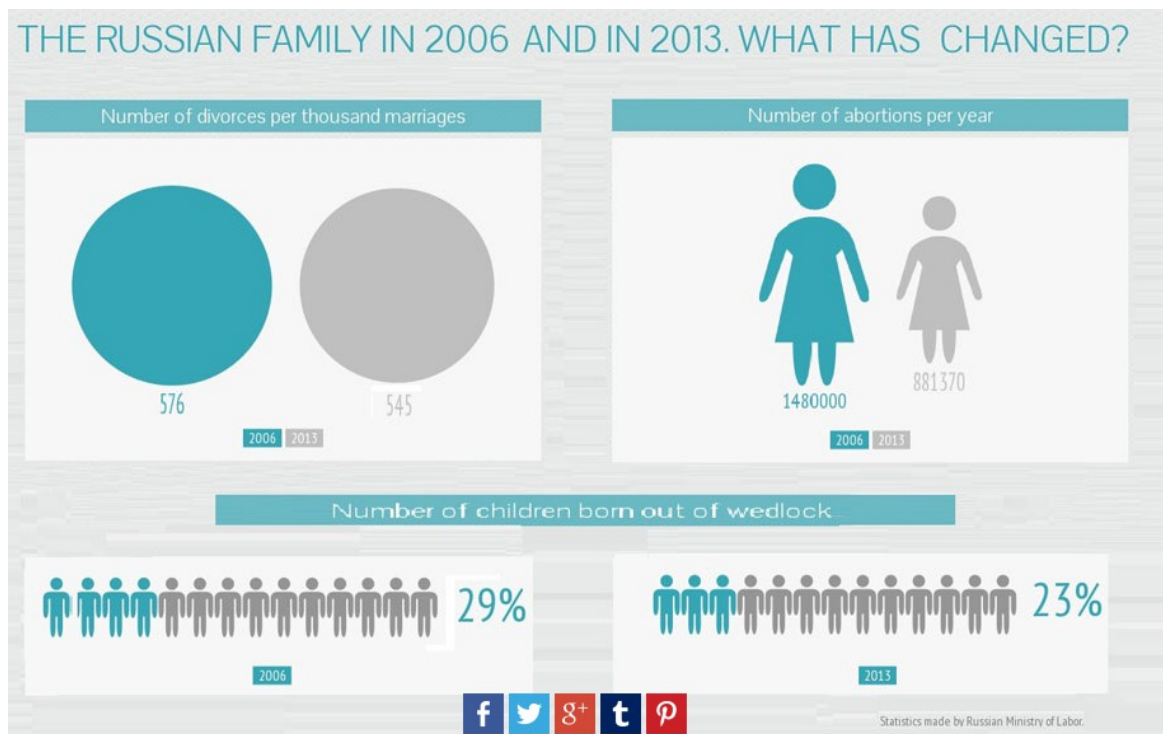


Illustration 9: Trends in divorce rates, abortions, and children born outside of marriage.

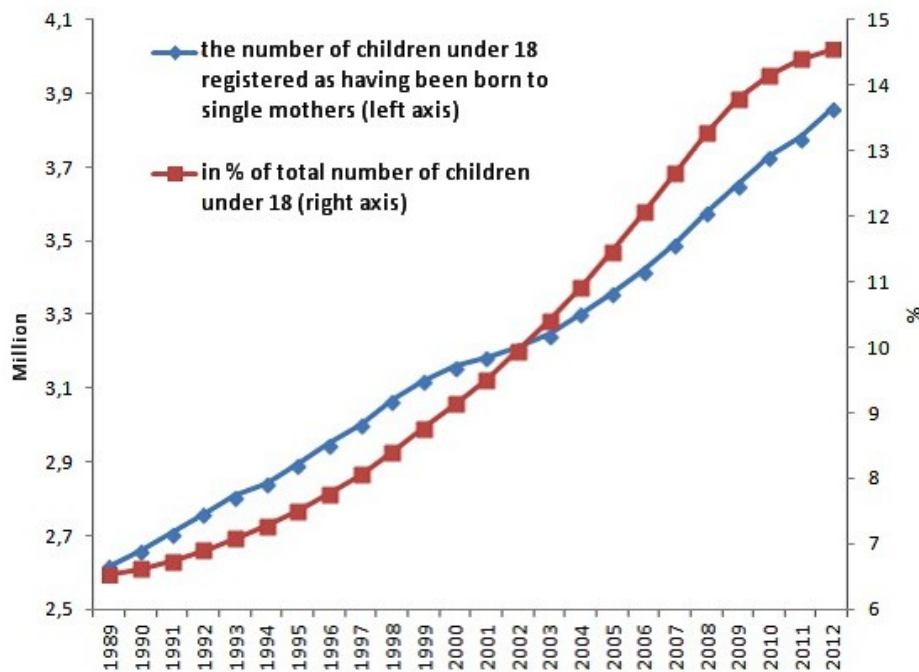


Illustration 10: The number of children born to single mothers and their percent share [12].

Interestingly, in these scenarios, many of these single mothers have multiple births. On average, there are 1.3 births for every woman who has not been married, and 1.6 births for every woman who has not cohabited with a male partner. Eventually, one out of three of these single mothers will marry or remarry, so being single might be a temporary phenomena. Although currently, as many as 15% of all children are born to a single mother, 25% of all children were raised in “fragmented families,” e.g., a family that at one point had no father figure in the household [12].

In married situations, the duties of mothers in Russia is more than those of the relatively egalitarian relationships of the United States. A large share of mothers are motivated to both have a secure and stable job that might have reduced salary as well as maintaining all housewife duties, which include both childcare and educational activities. These duties, however, limit the work options for a significant share of career oriented women that also have children. This is an especially important factor that single mothers consider since a single mother is more likely to not only have a decent future but also remarry if she has personal success at her work. The primary issue, however, is finding a reasonable work-life balance. As a result, it has become a social norm for Russian mothers to have only one child.

Overall, young Russians are undergoing an identity crisis – they wish for an ideal and happy family as prescribed by their culture, and yet they take part in contradictory practices. In practice, family itself is losing its value and children are sometimes less desirable in spite of their idealistic wishes. Furthermore, among other factors, mothers are being more career-motivated, limiting their desire for having multiple children.

4 Conclusion

The United States and Russia are countries that have dramatically different historical foundations and traditional family structures. For example, in the United States, families in the mid-twentieth century were nuclear with only the father as the breadwinner and the mother as the housewife, whereas in the Soviet Union, egalitarian and socialistic principals brought women into the workforce, but mothers were still expected to do all of the house chores after working. Then, with the advent of feminism, and the desire for financial self-sufficiency, and professional motivation, women in both countries continued to advance their education and careers to be seen as equals with their male peers. However, in both cases, traditional family and bearing many children had become less of a priority. Although different in each country, both the USA and Russia are facing higher divorce rates or simply not marrying, women are bearing children at older ages, and, in order to maintain their professional careers, bearing less children, which leads to low birth rates and population decline. Overall, this leads to a mentally degraded population that is less suitable for raising children and, in the long term, can lead to a demographic nightmare. Moreover, traditional marriages appear to be a remnant of the past. Therefore, perhaps government and charities should take a much larger role to promote having children and removing the burden of parenthood for 21st century families.

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